

STATINTL

THE ECONOMIST SEPT 9

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## Unscrew this doll with care

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FROM OUR SAIGON CORRESPONDENT

South Vietnam's election results make one feel like a child presented with his first-  
ever Russian wooden doll of the sort that  
unscrews to reveal a nest of smaller ones  
inside. If you take the votes cast at their  
face value, then Generals Thieu and Ky,  
with only some 35 per cent of the total,  
look pretty unpopular winners. The 16  
per cent of the votes that went to the  
runner-up, Mr Truong Dinh Dzu, look  
like a strong peace and protest vote. After  
all, Mr Dzu was by far the most virulent  
critic of the generals, and was the only  
candidate who proposed ending the war  
just like that.

But is it really as simple as this? A  
Saigon politician, after offering a visitor  
similar thoughts, will say, "Well, that's  
my public interpretation. Now for the  
explanation in depth." Then, with a smile  
of pleasure at his own dexterity, he begins  
to unscrew the apparently solid wooden  
doll. The point is that when you come to  
examine it, the remarkable vote for Mr  
Dzu cannot be explained as a protest  
protesting cry for peace: though the wish  
for peace is there all right. Mr Dzu has

never been in big-time politics before.  
Until he announced his presidential candi-  
dacy he was known in Saigon as a clever  
but controversial lawyer who was briefly  
imprisoned for alleged fraud under Presi-  
dent Diem. He claims this was unjust, and  
the National Assembly credentials com-  
mittee that allowed his candidacy to go  
through seemed to agree with him. But  
the fact is that "nice" Saigonese are chary  
of him. "It's a national disgrace," one  
prim official remarked when he heard  
that Dzu had come second.

The average voter would know or per-  
haps care little about this. He would have  
known of the 50-year-old Dzu through  
the papers, the radio or gossip. Some  
50,000 people probably heard his rapid  
and often funny speeches at election  
rallies throughout the country. Yet Mr  
Dzu failed to carry the cities, where his  
campaigning could be expected to have  
the most impact. Mr Huong, the darling  
of the south, won Saigon. Mr Suu, the  
Nang, presumably thanks to the Buddhist  
vote.

Mr Dzu's vote, by contrast, came from  
the countryside, not even from the  
country towns. It is hard to believe that  
his, or anyone's, campaign made that  
much impact in the villages. Particularly  
odd was his victory in the province of  
Tay Ninh, where the government was  
thought to be strong, and his near-victory  
in An Giang province, which has been  
wooed assiduously by Marshal Ky in the  
last year or so. Some people explain this  
by saying that the Vietcong decided to  
work (unrequested, of course) for Mr Dzu  
because this would achieve maximum dis-  
ruption after the election. Other theories  
suggest that, inevitably, the Central In-  
telligence Agency or, more subtly, some  
groups within the military government  
helped Mr Dzu.

The fact is that the civilian opposition  
to the victorious generals starts off on the  
wrong foot by being led by Mr Dzu. There  
is no doubt that some people close to the  
government think that Mr Dzu can easily  
be discredited, or will soon discredit him-  
self. Certainly his present liking for giving  
interviews to the television cameras will  
have to be curbed if he is to keep his  
present news value. At the same time, his  
success may well mark the political death  
of Mr Huong and Mr Suu. In particular,  
Mr Huong's dignified call for a restoration  
of traditional Vietnamese values looks a  
very lost cause. So in fact the 35 per cent  
of the vote won by the successful generals  
considerably under-represents their real  
political strength. The first threat to the  
generals comes not from their divided  
civilian opponents, but from themselves.

In the first place, there is the abiding  
problem of the Thieu-Ky relationship.  
The test of this could come when the new  
prime minister is appointed in a few  
weeks' time. Some people believe that  
Marshal Ky still harbours a hope of the  
premiership, though the constitution  
appears to rule that out. Then there is the  
question of how the other generals will  
react to Thieu's and Ky's constitutional  
elevation and the prospect of a far more  
genuinely civilian government. If nothing  
goes wrong, the new government will, as  
one minister put it this week, "just have  
to deal with all the old problems, only  
better."

One very important old problem is how  
to get the disaffected southern-born people  
back into the ruling establishment. The  
generals have signally failed to do this so  
far. The election, with second place going  
to Mr Dzu, who like General Thieu comes  
from central Vietnam, has only made  
matters worse. Unfortunately, none of the  
true southern tickets has managed to get